



where great stories begin™

## Testimony in Support of SB 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program

To the Honorable Chairs:

My name is Dr. Dipesh Navsaria, and I am a practicing primary-care pediatrician writing in support of Senate Bill 209. Many of you may remember that I presented at the "Books Build Better Brains" policy briefing at the Legislative Office Building last year.

As one of 20,000 pediatricians across the country participating in Reach Out and Read, I incorporate the program's evidence-based model into regular pediatric checkups by educating parents about the importance of reading aloud and giving new, developmentally-appropriate books to children. The program begins at the 6 month visit and continues through age 5.

Over the last 25 years, Reach Out and Read has transformed the practice of pediatrics. With a child with no identified known issue, I'd rather walk into the exam room without my stethoscope than without a book. Why? Because the book is a tool that provides me with a wealth of information about the child's cognitive, social and emotional development. And the American Academy of Pediatrics agrees. Last year, the AAP released official policy declaring literacy promotion to be an "essential component of pediatric care" for all children beginning at birth, referencing Reach Out and Read as an effective intervention to engage parents and prepare children to achieve their potential in school and beyond.

By enlisting pediatricians as early literacy mentors for families, Reach Out and Read solidifies parents' roles as nurturers and teachers for their children and helps them promote their children's healthy emotional and social development. Nurturing emerging social, emotional, and language skills buffers toxic stress and builds resilience by promoting healthy, adaptive coping skills.

There is no better time for this important intervention to take place: during the first five years of life, the brain is developing more rapidly than at any other time. And, creating the right conditions for early childhood development is more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age, as Nobel laureate in economics James Heckman tells us. Reach Out and Read is efficient, scalable, boundary-spanning, and is a powerful intervention that can be delivered by trusted messengers at low cost.

Funding through the State of Connecticut will allow Reach Out and Read to serve additional children in need, and I respectfully request that the Children's Committee support this important bill. Thank you for your consideration.